



Vancouver Island Safety Conference



2025 CONFERENCE WRAP-UP

Facing the Future Together: The Human Side of Safety

November 1, 2025 | Vancouver Island Conference Centre

Honouring the Snuneymuxw First Nation: VISC Delegates are Welcomed to Their Traditional Lands



Snuneymuxw Elder and VIU Elder-in-Residence, Geraldine Manson (C-tasi:a), opened the conference with a heartfelt prayer and song, expressing gratitude for everyone's commitment to safety. She gave special recognition to younger attendees for stepping up and gaining vital safety knowledge as they prepare to take on roles left by retirees, emphasizing passion, compassion and the responsibility of carrying this vital work forward.

Thank you, Geraldine, for your inspiring words. Hychqa C'tala.

Facing the Future Together with a Commitment to Safety and Unity

BC Forest Safety Council CEO Rob Moonen kicked off the 18th annual conference by warmly welcoming everyone and thanking us for our willingness to give up our Saturday to attend. He emphasized that resilience, adaptability and commitment are essential for navigating today's challenges in the forestry industry and that safety must remain a top priority. Highlighting the theme "Facing the Future Together,"

Rob stressed the importance of unity and shared responsibility in building a strong safety culture. He encouraged us to take insights from the day's speakers back to our workplaces to improve safety practices and communication. Rob also reflected on recent fatalities, reaffirming the goal of ensuring every worker returns home safe. Every day.



Thank you to the 299 delegates who participated in the 18th Annual Vancouver Island Safety Conference! This year's theme, "*Facing the Future Together: The Human Side of Safety*," showcased three keynote speakers and a series of industry presentations that focussed on enhancing safety practices across generations in the forestry sector.

We also extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the volunteers and sponsors who made this conference and networking event possible. The generosity of our sponsors, through their financial contributions, product donations, and services, along with the invaluable time our volunteers dedicated, allowed us to offer this FREE event. Thank you all for your support!

SAVE THE DATE
FOR VISC 2026



Supporting Our Community

For 18 years, the Vancouver Island Safety Conference has offered attendees valuable insights into BC forestry safety through this free conference, but its impact reaches far beyond the conference room.

Each year, with the generous support of our delegates, we are able to assist three charities and help make a positive change to many lives throughout British Columbia.

KidSport Nanaimo has been a valued recipient of the silent auction contributions at the conference for many years. This worthy cause is chosen in memory of Fred McEachern. KidSport provides financial assistance to children who want to participate in organized sports. This year the silent auction raised \$2,495 for these deserving kids.

Our 50/50 draw brought in a total of \$955, half of which went to the **Vancouver Island Mental Health Society**, a non-profit organization that provides recovery, housing and hope to adults experiencing mental health issues. Nancy Ponting shared the other half of the pot taking home \$477.50 in winnings.

Loaves and Fishes Nanaimo Foodbank has been receiving support from VISC attendees for many years. Conference goers are invited to contribute non-perishable food items and cash donations instead of paying conference registration fees. This year, our delegates truly demonstrated their generosity and compassion, bringing in hundreds of pounds of non-perishable food and contributing \$485 in cash donations to this essential organization.

Prize Winners

Each year we pick a winner from attendees who participate in our conference survey. This year Conor Pierce won our grand prize of a Razer Gaming Kit valued at \$725 which was generously donated by London Drugs.

Our Early Bird Registration prize winner was Natalie Howson, a forestry student from VIU who won a BCFSC Stanfield, toque and socks for simply registering before Sept 15th. Not bad a reward for something so easy.



In Tribute to Those We Lost in 2025



Master of Ceremonies, **Mike Milholm** led a Moment of Silence to honour those we lost since the 2024 Vancouver Island Safety Conference. May their memories serve as a reminder of the importance of safety to ensure every worker goes home safe. Every day.

OCCUPATION	AGE	CAUSE OF DEATH
Machine Operator	67	Occupational Disease
Skidder Operator	58	Traumatic Injury
Welder	87	Occupational Disease
Pipefitter	92	Occupational Disease
Insulator	83	Occupational Disease
Shipper	57	Occupational Disease
Millwright	90	Occupational Disease
Pipefitter	54	Occupational Disease
Forestry Worker	62	Traumatic Injury
Silviculture Worker	27	Motor Vehicle Accident
Silviculture Worker	19	Motor Vehicle Accident
Silviculture Worker	21	Motor Vehicle Accident
Silviculture Worker	37	Motor Vehicle Accident
Electrician	74	Occupational Disease
Aircraft Mechanic	31	Aircraft Accident
Carpenter	85	Occupational Disease
Transport Driver	62	Motor Vehicle Accident
Pipefitter	45	Traumatic Injury
Insulator	69	Occupational Disease
Skidder Operator	63	Traumatic Injury
Tree Faller	47	Traumatic Injury
Forestry Supervisor	51	Traumatic Injury
Construction Manager	65	Traumatic Injury
Equipment Operator	40	Traumatic Injury
Forestry Worker	85	Traumatic Injury
Forestry Worker	83	Traumatic Injury
Forestry Worker	69	Traumatic Injury
Carpenter	91	Traumatic Injury
Forestry Worker	66	Motor Vehicle Accident
Maintenance Supervisor	90	Occupational Disease

Celebrating Leadership in Forestry Safety with the 2025 Safety Awards

Conference attendees celebrated Leadership in Forestry Safety with the 2025 Leadership in Safety Awards

The 2025 Leadership in Safety Awards were presented by BCFSC's CEO, Rob Moonen. These awards honour the exceptional contributions to safety in the forestry industry and recognize individuals, crews, and companies that have made significant strides in workplace safety, reinforcing the goal of ensuring every worker returns home safely.

This year, three outstanding individuals were celebrated:



2025 Safety Award Winners

Cary White Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award | Bjarne Nielsen – Bear Safety Services Ltd.

Bjarne has devoted over 25 years to advancing safety in BC's forestry industry, including 18 years as a WorkSafeBC Prevention Officer. A Canadian Registered Safety Professional, he's mentored countless individuals, developed programs, and championed a culture of respect and collaboration. Known for integrity and commitment, Bjarne's legacy of compassion and action has shaped safer workplaces across the province.

Forest Safety MVP Award | Dale Jones – Operations Superintendent, Tolko Industries Ltd., Heffley Creek. Dale is recognized for over 30 years of leadership in forest safety. As Operations Superintendent, he brings practical, common-sense solutions that resonate with crews. Known for calm, honest communication, Dale fosters a culture where safety is second nature. His influence extends beyond his team, inspiring others across Tolko to take ownership and continuously improve. This award honours his lasting impact and example.

Manufacturing Safety MVP Award | Shane Norbury – Millwright, Western Forest Products, Chemainus Shane has been a driving force for safety at Chemainus Sawmill. A Red Seal Millwright and long-time safety committee member, he leads by example—prioritizing coworkers' well-being. From spearheading initiatives to improving ergonomics, Shane's hands-on approach and attention to detail have strengthened the mill's safety culture. His approachable nature and commitment to shared responsibility make him a true safety champion.

Congratulations to the award winners for their incredible dedication and the positive impact they've made on forestry safety!

Nominate a Leader in Safety for 2026

Do you know someone you would like to recognize for safety achievement in forestry? Nominate someone in one of three categories including safety in harvesting, manufacturing and lifetime achievement, to be honoured at the 2026 Vancouver Island Safety Conference on Saturday, October 17th next year.

Nominations for leaders in forestry safety can be an individual, crew, team, division, contractor, company, supplier, consultant, trainer, etc. - basically anyone that deserves to be recognized for outstanding safety leadership or achievements. Visit the BCFSC website for complete details. Scan the QR Code to access the Leadership in Safety Awards web page.

How to nominate: email your nomination to info@bcforestsafe.org. Within your email include:

- Nominee's name (first and last)
- Nominee's Job Title
- Nominee's location and employer
- Your name and email address
- Nomination Category: Cary White Award | Forest Safety MVP | Manufacturing Safety MVP
- The reason for the nomination (please provide as much detail as possible)



Workplace Safety, What's Your Why?

Keynote Presentation by Steve Howe

Steve Howe's keynote was one of the most memorable and emotionally impactful sessions of the conference. Drawing from his own experience as a third-generation logger and a survivor of a devastating workplace accident, Steve shared a deeply personal story that connected safety, leadership and the human cost of our decisions on the job.

Back in 2006, while working on the Sea to Sky Highway project, Steve made the choice to return to work despite a doctor's note advising rest for mental health reasons. That decision led to a life-changing incident where he was struck by an excavator bucket, resulting in severe injuries, a three-month coma and over 80 surgeries. His story wasn't just about the physical trauma—it was about the ripple effect that followed: the emotional toll on his family, the loss of his father's job and the long road to recovery.



Keynote Speaker, Steve Howe

Some of the key takeaways from Steve's message included:

- **The Human Cost of Safety Decisions:** Every choice matters. One unsafe decision can have lifelong consequences for workers and their families.
- **Mental Health & Invisible Injuries:** Steve highlighted the stigma around mental health and the pressure to "tough it out" in male-dominated industries.
- **The Ripple Effect:** Incidents don't just affect workers, they impact families, careers and futures.
- **Leadership & Influence:** Supervisors shape safety culture through clear communication, positive reinforcement and modeling safe behaviour.
- **Finding Your "Why":** Identify what matters most. Family, health or passions can guide safe choices.
- **Belief & Resilience:** Steve's recovery journey underscored the power of belief and resilience in achieving zero-incident workplaces.

Throughout the presentation, Steve emphasized how safety isn't just about rules and procedures—it's about people. He challenged the audience to think about their own "why": the people and passions that make life meaningful. Whether it's family, hobbies, or simply the ability to take a deep breath, Steve reminded us that every safe choice we make protects what matters most.

He also spoke directly to leaders and supervisors, showing how their words and actions—intentional or not—can influence workers' decisions. Through humorous and relatable skits, he illustrated how vague instructions or missed opportunities to correct unsafe behaviour can send the wrong message. His advice: be clear, be consistent, and recognize good behaviour, because what gets recognized gets repeated.

One of the most powerful moments came when Steve talked about his daughters and the heartbreak of not being able to play soccer with them like other dads. It was a raw reminder that the consequences of unsafe work can last a lifetime and affect those we love in ways we don't always anticipate.

Steve closed with a challenge: choose "Door Number Three." Believe that injury-free work is possible. Believe that safety is worth it. And most importantly, believe that every decision we make matters.

Steve's presentation was a powerful reminder that safety is personal. His story will stay with attendees long after the conference ends, inspiring a renewed commitment to working safely—for ourselves, our teams, and our families.

Forestry Together

Presenting Speakers Marla Guldbransen and Nicole Arkle

BCFSC Falling Manager Marla Guldbransen and Gorman Group's Communication Coordinator Nicole Arkle delivered an engaging, interactive session on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), challenging

stereotypes and showing how an inclusive workforce strengthens the forestry industry. They emphasized that DEI isn't about politics, it's about people and it creates safer, more innovative workplaces where everyone feels respected and valued.

They highlighted practical steps organizations can take, like providing PPE that fits all body types, implementing mentorship programs and adopting inclusive hiring practices. They also introduced resources available through the Forests Together initiative to help companies build stronger, more diverse teams.

Marla and Nicole reinforced that DEI is not a trend, it's a workforce strategy that improves retention, innovation and safety. They connected inclusion to broader safety principles, reminding attendees that safety is a long-term investment in people, families and communities. Indigenous values offer guidance for sustainable, respectful practices, and building a culture of safety requires leadership, consistency and courage.

Their message was clear: inclusion is a strategic advantage, and everyone has a role to play in creating a culture where more people feel safe, respected and excited to build a career in forestry.



Taking the Time to Do It Right

Presenting Speaker: John Jack

Chief Councillor, John Jack of Huu-ay-aht First Nation shared his personal story growing up in a forestry family, and how his father's workplace injury shaped his life. He emphasized that safety decisions made today can have serious effects on future generations. Drawing from his experience in treaty negotiations and economic development, he spoke about the importance of integrating Indigenous values including respect, interconnectedness, and care for future generations, into business and safety practices. His message was clear: safety is foundational to long-term community resilience and economic sustainability.



Pursuing a Culture of Safety

Presenting Speaker: D'Arcy Henderson

D'Arcy Henderson, Senior Vice President of Timberlands and COO at Mosaic Forest Management, shared insights from his 40-year forestry career, from his early days in a planer mill to executive leadership. He spoke about moving from reactive safety to proactive culture-building, where safety becomes a shared value across all levels of an organization.



He emphasized the importance of habits, systems, and leadership, and challenged attendees to take small, consistent actions that build trust and reduce risk. His call to action: make safety visible, make it simple, and make it everyone's responsibility.

Return-to-Work Best Practices

Presenting Speakers: Colleen Skinner and Elise Kobylanski

WorkSafeBC's Return-to-Work specialists Elise Kobylanski and Colleen Skinner led a practical session on why early, collaborative planning makes a big difference for injured workers. They explained new requirements under Bill 41, including the duty to cooperate and the duty to maintain employment, and what those mean for both employers and workers.

They highlighted the importance that staying connected to the workplace helps recovery and lowers the risk of long-term disability. Elise and Colleen stressed that successful return-to-work plans aren't just about ticking boxes, they rely on good communication, empathy and clear documentation. They encouraged employers to reach out early, keep conversations open and work together to create plans that prioritize safety and well-being. The takeaway? Return-to-work planning isn't just about compliance, it's about helping people heal, stay engaged and get back to work successfully.



Surviving to Thriving: A Guide to Self-health

Keynote Presentation by Sylvia Marusyk

Sylvia Marusyk delivered a dynamic and engaging keynote focused on the critical connection between mental health and workplace safety. With humor, Sylvia Marusyk delivered a dynamic and engaging keynote that explored the critical link between mental health and workplace safety. With humor, science and personal storytelling, she showed how chronic stress affects the brain, impairs judgment and increases risk on the job. Her central message was clear: mental health is not separate from physical health, it's one system, and it directly impacts safety outcomes.

Sylvia explained that how we feel mentally and emotionally influences how we work, make decisions and stay safe. Using relatable stories and scientific insights, she described how chronic stress rewires the brain. Stress enlarges the amygdala, the brain's threat center, and reduces blood flow to the prefrontal cortex, which controls decision-making, hazard recognition and emotional regulation. This neurological shift compromises focus and increases the likelihood of mistakes and incidents.

She encouraged attendees to shift their perspective from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" This simple change fosters empathy, reduces conflict and strengthens workplace culture. Sylvia reminded us that stress and trauma don't just affect individuals, they ripple through teams and organizations, influencing safety and productivity.

Her keynote wasn't just theory; it was practical. Sylvia shared actionable tools for calming the nervous system and improving resilience. Techniques like breathwork, taking breaks in nature and engaging in creative activities help workers stay grounded and focused. These strategies are simple, science-backed and effective for reducing stress and improving safety.

Sylvia's personal stories added depth and authenticity to her message. She spoke openly about surviving cancer and navigating grief and trauma, illustrating that resilience is possible even in the hardest circumstances. Her mantra was powerful: humans don't break, we bend. With the right support and self-care, we can bounce back stronger.

Key takeaways from Sylvia's keynote included:

- **Mind-Body Connection:** Mental and physical health are inseparable. Ignoring stress can lead to physical symptoms, poor judgment and increased risk.
- **The Biology of Stress:** Chronic stress changes brain function, reducing our ability to make safe decisions and respond calmly under pressure.
- **Workplace Culture and Empathy:** Shifting to a trauma-informed mindset builds trust, reduces conflict and improves team dynamics.
- **Practical Tools for Regulation:** Breathwork, nature breaks and creative outlets help regulate stress and keep workers safe.
- **Personal Resilience:** Self-awareness and self-care are not luxuries—they're necessities for safety and well-being.

Sylvia closed with a powerful reminder: safety starts with self-awareness and emotional health. Taking care of mental health isn't just good for individuals, it benefits teams, organizations and families. Her session was educational, inspiring and deeply personal, leaving attendees with practical strategies and a renewed commitment to creating safer, healthier workplaces.

Support Resource:

- [MindyBody Works Quick Tips - Shifting to Rest and Restore](#)



Keynote Speaker, Sylvia Marusyk

Support Resource



Find Your Voice, Find Yourself

Keynote Presentation by Justin Brien

Justin Brien closed the conference with a powerful and deeply personal keynote that left a lasting impression. He shared his journey through depression, addiction and recovery, speaking candidly about the struggles that nearly cost him his life and the choices that helped him rebuild it.

Justin described the impact of living in his mother's basement as a grown man, battling addiction and losing his family because of it. It was a dark hole he couldn't climb out of. Growing up with low self-esteem, he masked his pain through substance use. His turning point came after an attempted suicide, lying in a hospital bed as his son asked, "What's wrong with Daddy?" That moment sparked change. Justin realized he needed to find purpose and rebuild his life, not just for his son, but for himself.

He emphasized that everyone has a story and deserves support. Mental health affects everyone, regardless of age, background or profession. Justin encouraged attendees to ask for help, be honest about their struggles and find their "why"—the reason to keep going when life gets hard. For him, that "why" was his son. He realized he needed to become someone who could be relied upon, as a son, a father, a co-worker and a friend.

He shared practical tools that helped him in his recovery and left us with some key messages we can build on:

- **Mental Health as an Operating System:** It underpins our thoughts, actions and relationships. Ignoring it can lead to isolation, loss and self-destruction. Mental health and addiction don't discriminate, they can affect anyone.
- **The Power of Vulnerability:** Asking for help is not weakness, it's strength and it's actually one of the strongest things a person can do.
- **Substance Use as a Coping Mechanism:** Untreated mental health can lead to addiction and devastating consequences. Alcohol and drugs can quickly become tools to mask pain, boost confidence and escape reality but left unchecked, they lead to a slippery slope of addiction.
- **Finding Your "Why":** Dig deep to identify a personal reason and hang onto it during the fight for recovery. Recovery is possible, but it all starts with honesty and a willingness to change.
- **Tools for Healing:** Justin uses journaling, gratitude, exercise, therapy and self-compassion to work on his mental health. He reminded us that healing takes work and self-love, challenging negative self-talk and embracing the inner work are essential.
- **The Role of Community:** Recovery is not a solo journey; support systems matter. Family, friends, co-workers, mental health professionals and even strangers can help you find your voice.

Justin's keynote was a heartfelt call to action: check in with yourself, support one another and never underestimate the power of asking for help. His journey from pain to purpose reinforced the importance of mental health awareness in both personal and professional spaces.

Support Resources:

- [Find Your Voice. Find Yourself Presentation Summary](#)
- [The Mental Health Menu \(14-day Challenge\)](#)
- [Mental Health and Suicidal Ideation](#)



Support Resources



Conference Survey Results

A total of 156 attendees participated in the survey, sharing their feedback on the 2025 VISC Conference. The breakdown of participants revealed that the majority came from the harvesting sector, accounting for 62%. The manufacturing sector represented 22% and 19% of the audience were students.

The audience primarily consisted of 32% workers and 31% were managers, with supervisors making up 19%. owners represented 7% of the attendees. 51% of participants were either Worker Safety Representatives or JOHSC Committee members.

95% of the attendees felt the conference was very helpful and a great networking opportunity.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Steve Howe

Workplace Safety: What's Your Why

Great - 85%

Good - 14%

"Very moving! So authentic and relatable."

"Many good takeaways from this presentation."

Sylvia Marusyk

Surviving to Thriving: A Guide to Self-health

Great - 61%

Good - 33%

"Super dynamic, hilarious and engaging. I was able to tie in some of Steve's messages. Well done!!"

"Brain science is always interesting topic. It helps people understand why they do what they do."

Justin Brien

Find Your Voice: Find Yourself

Great - 58%

Good - 33%

"Inspirational story which I hear more often than we would want to. His story is a reminder to hold loves ones close take a breath and always keep looking to the future.."

PRESENTING SPEAKERS

Marla Guldbransen and Nicole Arkle

Forestry Together

Great - 32%

Good - 40%

"Great insights on a less divisive look at DEI."

"Content was good. Proved many skillsets are required."

Colleen Skinner and Elise Kobylanski

Return to Work Obligations and Best Practices

Great - 32%

Good - 29%

"Clear concise information and examples"

"I learned some key points with return to work."

John Jack

Taking the Time to Do It Right

Great - 33%

Good - 31%

"Good personal and safety perspectives from personal and past"

"Valuable presentation we could all learn from."

D'Arcy Henderson

Pursuing a Culture of Safety

Great - 35%

Good - 40%

"Good messaging from COO perspective."

"Great speaker. I took in alot as I've only been in forestry just over two years."

FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTIONS:

"I liked how well the presenters talks fit together. There was a great unity to the conference."

"Please continue the conversation about mental health and its role in the workplace."

"One of the best I have been to."

"Students perspectives on safety protocols and ways to achieve compliance in young workers."

"More time to go around to each company's stand."

"More about heavy equipment. trades. forest fires suppression road safety and addiction help."

"The 3 keynotes may have been the best yet!"

"This is my first safety conference and am completely enlightened. Look forward to next year."

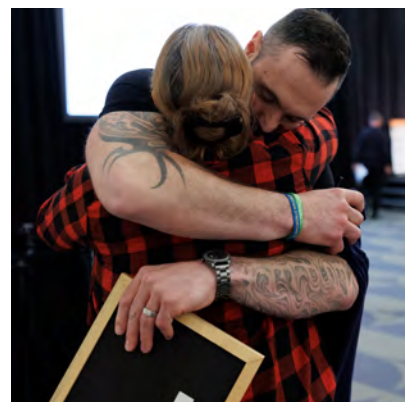


2025

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Conference Moments, captured by Geoff Howe, Photographer for VISC 2025



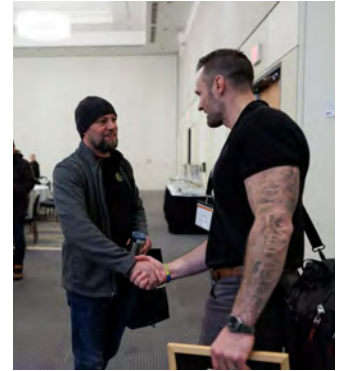


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Conference Moments, captured by Geoff Howe, Photographer for VISC 2025





2025



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Thank you to our sponsors for their generosity. Their support allows us to provide free admission for conference attendees.



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